

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please CANCEL claims 1-7, 9, 11, 13, 14, and 18 without prejudice to or disclaimer of their subject matter. Please AMEND claims 8, 10, 12, 15-17, and 19, as follows.

1-7. (Cancelled)

8. (Currently Amended) A sheet handling apparatus according to Claim 7, comprising:

intermediate handling means for temporarily stacking a sheet conveyed from sheet conveyance means to handle the sheet;

stack means for stacking the sheets handled;

sheet rear end aligning means capable of moving selectively to a support position at which it supports the lower face of the sheet bundle handled by said intermediate handling means, or an escape position at which it escapes from the lower face of said sheet bundle to drop said sheet bundle onto said stack means;

control means for changing the position of said sheet rear end aligning means between the support position and the escape position; and

sheet holding means for holding the rear end portions of the sheets stacked on said stack means,

wherein said control means makes controls so that it may cooperate to perform the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means for moving from the

escape position to the support position to align the rear end of the sheet bundle dropped on said stack means and the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means,

wherein said control means makes controls to changes the pushing force by said sheet holding means in accordance with the change in the rate of the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means.

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently Amended) A sheet handling apparatus according to Claim 9, comprising:

intermediate handling means for temporarily stacking a sheet conveyed from sheet conveyance means to handle the sheet;
stack means for stacking the sheets handled;
sheet rear end aligning means capable of moving selectively to a support position at which it supports the lower face of the sheet bundle handled by said intermediate handling means, or an escape position at which it escapes from the lower face of said sheet bundle to drop said sheet bundle onto said stack means;

control means for changing the position of said sheet rear end aligning means between the support position and the escape position; and

sheet holding means for holding the rear end portions of the sheets stacked on said stack means,

wherein said control means makes controls so that it may cooperate to perform the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means for moving from the escape position to the support position to align the rear end of the sheet bundle dropped on said stack means and the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means.

wherein said control means makes controls:

to start the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means at an earlier timing than that of the end of the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means; and

to end the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means at a timing simultaneous with or later than that of the end of the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means.

11. (Cancelled)

12. (Currently Amended) A sheet handling apparatus according to Claim 11, comprising:

intermediate handling means for temporarily stacking a sheet conveyed from sheet conveyance means to handle the sheet;

stack means for stacking the sheets handled;

sheet rear end aligning means capable of moving selectively to a support position at which it supports the lower face of the sheet bundle handled by said intermediate

handling means, or an escape position at which it escapes from the lower face of said sheet bundle to drop said sheet bundle onto said stack means;

control means for changing the position of said sheet rear end aligning means between the support position and the escape position;

sheet holding means for holding the rear end portions of the sheets stacked on said stack means,

wherein said control means makes controls so that it may cooperate to perform the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means for moving from the escape position to the support position to align the rear end of the sheet bundle dropped on said stack means and the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means; and

a drive unit for driving said sheet rear end aligning means and said sheet holding means with common drive means,

wherein said drive unit includes:

a rocking shaft for transmitting the rotation of said drive means to support said sheet rear end aligning means in a rocking manner;

a rotary shaft for supporting said sheet holding means rotatably; and

drive transmission means for transmitting the rotation of said rocking shaft to said rotary shaft, and

whereby said sheet rear end aligning means is rocked according to the rotation of a cam portion provided by said rotary shaft.

13-14. (Cancelled)

15. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus according to Claim 14, comprising:

an image forming unit for forming an image on a sheet;

intermediate handling means for temporarily stacking the image-formed sheet to handle the sheet;

stack means for stacking the sheets handled;

sheet rear end aligning means capable of moving selectively to a support position at which it supports the lower face of the sheet bundle handled by said intermediate handling means, or an escape position at which it escapes from the lower face of said sheet bundle to drop said sheet bundle onto said stack means;

control means for changing the position of said sheet rear end aligning means between the support position and the escape position;

sheet holding means for holding the rear end portions of the sheets stacked on said stack means,

wherein said control means makes controls so that it may cooperate to perform the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means for moving from the escape position to the support position to align the rear end of the sheet bundle dropped on said stack means and the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means; and

wherein said control means makes controls to change the pushing force by said sheet holding means in accordance with the change in the rate of the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means.

16. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus according to Claim 14, comprising:

an image forming unit for forming an image on a sheet;
intermediate handling means for temporarily stacking the image-formed sheet
to handle the sheet;

stack means for stacking the sheets handled;
sheet rear end aligning means capable of moving selectively to a support
position at which it supports the lower face of the sheet bundle handled by said intermediate
handling means, or an escape position at which it escapes from the lower face of said sheet
bundle to drop said sheet bundle onto said stack means;

control means for changing the position of said sheet rear end aligning means
between the support position and the escape position;

sheet holding means for holding the rear end portions of the sheets stacked on
said stack means,

wherein said control means makes controls so that it may cooperate to perform
the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means for moving from the
escape position to the support position to align the rear end of the sheet bundle dropped on said
stack means and the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means; and

wherein said control means makes controls to generate a pushing force for said
sheet holding means to push said sheet toward said sheet rear end aligning means, after said sheet
rear end aligning means begins to push the rear end of said sheet.

17. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus according to Claim 14, comprising:

an image forming unit for forming an image on a sheet;
intermediate handling means for temporarily stacking the image-formed sheet
to handle the sheet;
stack means for stacking the sheets handled;
sheet rear end aligning means capable of moving selectively to a support
position at which it supports the lower face of the sheet bundle handled by said intermediate
handling means, or an escape position at which it escapes from the lower face of said sheet
bundle to drop said sheet bundle onto said stack means;

control means for changing the position of said sheet rear end aligning means
between the support position and the escape position;
sheet holding means for holding the rear end portions of the sheets stacked on
said stack means,

wherein said control means makes controls so that it may cooperate to perform
the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means for moving from the
escape position to the support position to align the rear end of the sheet bundle dropped on said
stack means and the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means; and

wherein said control means makes controls:
to start the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means at an earlier
timing than that of the end of the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning
means; and

to end the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means at a timing simultaneous with or later than that of the end of the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means.

18. (Cancelled)

19. An image forming apparatus according to Claim 18, comprising:
an image forming unit for forming an image on a sheet;
intermediate handling means for temporarily stacking the image-formed sheet
to handle the sheet;
stack means for stacking the sheets handled;
sheet rear end aligning means capable of moving selectively to a support
position at which it supports the lower face of the sheet bundle handled by said intermediate
handling means, or an escape position at which it escapes from the lower face of said sheet
bundle to drop said sheet bundle onto said stack means;
control means for changing the position of said sheet rear end aligning means
between the support position and the escape position;
sheet holding means for holding the rear end portions of the sheets stacked on
said stack means,
wherein said control means makes controls so that it may cooperate to perform
the sheet rear end aligning operation by said sheet rear end aligning means for moving from the

escape position to the support position to align the rear end of the sheet bundle dropped on said stack means and the sheet holding operation by said sheet holding means; and
a drive unit for driving said sheet rear end aligning means and said sheet holding means with common drive means,

wherein said drive unit includes:

a rocking shaft for transmitting the rotation of said drive means to support said sheet rear end aligning means in a rocking manner;

a rotary shaft for supporting said sheet holding means rotatably; and

drive transmission means for transmitting the rotation of said rocking shaft to said rotary shaft, and

whereby said sheet rear end aligning means is rocked according to the rotation of a cam portion provided by said rotary shaft.